

THE NATURE OF THINGS By SIR WILLIAM BRAGG

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An Interstellar Novelet

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KUMMER, JR.

## THE GREEN RAY

A Novelet of the  
Twenty-First  
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By ARTHUR L.  
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# THRILLING WONDER STORIES



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NEXT ISSUE

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### ● ON THE COVER

This cover painting depicts a scene from THE EXTERMINATORS, a novelet by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., in this issue.

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# The THING FROM MARS

Laboratory Science Produces  
an Incredible Form  
of Matter!

By  
**RAY CUMMINGS**

*Author of "Around the Universe," "The Space-Time-Size Machine," etc.*

**“W**HAT is this thing from Mars?” he thought.

He stood by the door of old Jons' laboratory with the light of the burning gases and the fluorescence from the dome painting his burly figure, his bullet head of close-clipped, black hair. His face, heavy-featured, thick-lipped, was grimly set. His little eyes gleamed with cupidity. His long arms dangled at his sides, with powerful fingers that twitched.

“What is this thing he is going to rebuild?” he thought. “If I had it, I could make myself rich.”

And aloud he said suddenly: “Did you call me? Did you want the laboratory cleaned now? It is very dirty.”

The old chemist turned from the strong steel shelf by the laboratory wall where he was gazing at the dials that recorded the electronic pressure in the big, fluorescent dome.

“Eh? Oh, it's you, Bartoh? What are you doing here? I did not buzz for you.”

“I thought I heard it,” Bartoh said.

He wondered if his voice sounded queer. Slowly he advanced into the



Bartoh flung  
the switch



The row of hydrogen torches  
seemed a little brighter



room. There were only the two of them, here alone tonight in the little steel house which was old Jons' workshop and home. No one would hear Jons if he screamed. There would be no one to say it wasn't an accident that had killed the old chemist. There would be no witness, except Bartoh, his servant and laboratory helper.

At seventy, one could get absent-minded and make mistakes. There were many things here, hissing with a million voltars of electronic power, which if one touched, one was dead. So often Bartoh had been warned to be careful of them.

"I'll get the thing first, and then I'll kill him," Bartoh thought.

"Are you performing the experiment now?" he said. "The thing from Mars that you told me you could rebuild? What is it?"

Jons' hand was on a switch; he was intently checking the series of little dials whose pointers were swaying. Then he suddenly shoved at the switch.

The opal light vanished in the big dome of the fluorescent vacuum. The electron glare which had painted the frail small figure of the old chemist was gone. There was left only the flat, pallid light of the burning hydrogen torches that were ranged in a row on a high steel shelf with a series of durallite retorts over them. The flat, pallid light made the old man's seamed, thin face look bloodless—as though already he were dead.

**T**HEN he turned, as the light vanished, and sat down on his little stool.

"Eh? Oh, well, I don't mind telling you, Bartoh. But this is only the beginning of my experiment. Everything is coming fine, but I shall not complete it tonight. I could rebuild the thing tonight, if only I—"

"What is the thing, Master? You said it will make you rich and famous."

"Oh! Well, I guess it will. Sit down and watch me, if you like."

Jons was smiling now. He was pleased with himself. One may smile and be pleased, and yet not be aware of death that is so close.

"Tell me," Bartoh said. He sat on

a stool with his arms dangling between his knees.

"Tell you my secret?" Jons said. "No one knows that, as yet. But I'm convinced, if we could go to Mars, we would find it no secret at all. There was a meteorite fell, out here in my garden. Last year—before you came to work for me, Bartoh."

"I heard of it," Bartoh said.

"It brought me the remains of a new metal. A metal which I know exists on Mars—in a molten or gaseous state at least, because I have seen the lines of its light with the electro-spectroscope."

Carefully the big Bartoh was listening. When he got this thing he could wait a year or two—and who would ever be able to prove he had not made it himself?

On Mars, the old man was saying, there existed a new form of matter; a thing that was new to Earth. The Martian inhabitants—if indeed there were any Martian inhabitants—perhaps were putting it to many commercial usages. Here on Earth it would be revolutionary.

"Of what use, Master?" Bartoh asked.

Jons shook his head. "That I do not know. But anything so revolutionary will bring me fame and wealth. It will be an advancement of science."

He explained a little more. The meteorite, flaming in the Earth's atmosphere, had disintegrated this new substance which had been a small portion of its original mass.

"There was only a tiny fragment left, Bartoh." The old man's face was flushing with the memory. "It was very wonderful. A thing amazing! But before I could show it to anyone, the oxygen in our atmosphere burned it up. So when I recreate it now, I shall have to keep it in a vacuum."

"You have all the things necessary to recreate it?" Bartoh asked.

"Yes. The compounds that were in the meteorite—the fused metals—I have found how to separate them so that I can recreate the substance in its pure state. Breaking down the compounds. Discarding the unwanted ingredients until at last I have the orig-



inal substance. I have done almost all that, already."

His eyes were sparkling as he thought of his coming triumph. He gestured toward the bubbling retorts, where the viscous fluids were giving off wisps of vapor that were like tiny dissipating ghosts on the pallid hydrogen light.

"I'm going to call the new substance Jonsite," the old man added. "Wait until you see how rich and famous scientists flock here to our little laboratory, with their eyes popping out in wonderment."

**B**ARTOH sat very still and held his fingers from twitching.

"You will make it now, Master?"

"No, not now," Jons said. "But it's simple. I only have to sit here with my hand on that switch. Everything is ready for the final reaction. And that takes no more than a minute."

"There is no danger, touching that switch?" Bartoh forced his voice to be steady as he indicated the switch which was at the edge of the overhead shelf.

"Of course not," Jons said. "It merely opens a valve to let my final ingredient into those retorts. They're connected in series as you see. The argarite gas flows under pressure from one to the other of them. The whole thing is automatic. There is nothing to do but watch. The heat shuts off automatically. Liquid air cools the retorts. And in that big one, up there in the center of the row, my substance will congeal into its original pure state. A thing so amazing—"

"Let us do it now," Bartoh suggested. He moved a little on his stool.

"No," Jons said. "There is some apparatus—"

The words died in his throat. He saw the knife that suddenly was in Bartoh's hand.

"Why, good God, Bartoh!" he gasped.

The pallid light from the burning hydrogen torches glistened on the naked knife blade.

"Don't move," Bartoh said. "Don't speak. I'm going to tie you up—not kill you."

Not kill him until the thing from

Mars was successfully created.

"Why, my God!"

Then the old man just sat, docile, panting, trembling, with his lips white in the pallid light and his eyes like the eyes of a trapped animal.

"That's better," Bartoh chuckled. "Keep quiet and I won't hurt you."

There was only the hissing of the hydrogen torches and the old man's terrified panting breath as Bartoh produced the lengths of annealed flexible copper wire and bound Jons into an inert bundle and laid him on the laboratory floor, over in the corner.

The row of hydrogen torches seemed to burn a little brighter as though with eagerness now to complete their tasks, while Bartoh sat on the stool where Jons had been, and flung the little switch. The whole intricate mechanism on the steel shelf was alive with activity. There was a hiss as the released purple gas—the final ingredient—came out of its pressure tank. Bartoh sat breathless, triumphant, peering at this magic of science of which now he was master.

The steel shelf was stretched against the wall, in front of him almost on a level with his eyes. He could see the purple gas, heavy and turgid as it welled up in the tiny glassite tube that led from the tank into the first of the boiling retorts on the shelf. The gas came up slowly. Then in the silence, as it went into the retort, there was a muttering rumble of bubbling, boiling viscosity.

The bound old man over on the floor in the corner was staring with eyes like a trapped animal. Bartoh flashed him a glance of triumph. Only a minute, Jons had said. A minute more, and then the thing from Mars would be created here, to be possessed by Bartoh—to bring him wealth and fame, making his name ring through the country as the great man who had produced something new.

**T**HE link of transparent glassite tubing that connected the first with the second retort was growing turgid now. Vapors were swirling in it. The second retort was rumbling. Then the third, and the fourth. Until at last



the bigger tube that circled back to the retort in the center of the shelf was dark with an incoming, inklike vapor, sucking in with a flow infinitely rapid.

The hydrogen torches under the retorts had one by one all been extinguished. But still there was a flame under the central, pot-bellied little cauldron. It was transparent. Within it Bartoh saw the gasses swirling above the viscous surface of a boiling fluid in its bottom. The fluid content was shrinking; the vapors were thinning, sucking down into the liquid.

Then abruptly the hydrogen flame under the retort was extinguished. There was a hissing swirl of ghostlike white fog, a spray of liquid air upon the retort. For a moment the breathless Bartoh could see nothing save that frigid fog. Then, as it dissipated, there was visible the thick, gray liquid which now was low in the bottom of the retort.

It was shrinking, congealing as it cooled. In another few seconds it was just a half-inch level of gray fluid, rapidly turning solid, gathering itself into a little ball.

"Bartoh! For God's sake, Bartoh, you don't understand—"

He hardly heard the old man's gasping voice. He peered breathlessly at this thing from Mars which was forming itself now before his eyes. The gray ball was no bigger than a walnut, then smaller—turning darker, glistening sleek as gray-black glass there in the bottom of the transparent retort.

"Bartoh, for God's sake! You—"

The retort, squat and solid on its short thick, steel legs, seemed trembling. The whole strong steel shelf seemed trembling—like Bartoh himself, trembling with triumph.

The ball, all in that second, was no bigger than a pea. Then in the silence of the breathless laboratory, the retort broke with a splintering crack as it tilted forward on its legs. Bartoh's heart leaped and stuck in his throat. But the precious thing from Mars was unharmed. It had rolled to the quivering steel shelf.

A little gray-black pea . . . It was slowly rolling forward . . . it would fall off the edge. . . .

"Bartoh!"

But Bartoh had the wits to save it. From where he was sitting on the stool he reached up. His fingers gripped the tiny gray-black pea. He was aware of his hand coming down with it, or his hand falling with the pea so that his hand struck his chest and he went backward and downward to the planking of the laboratory floor.

For Bartoh there was just a flash of wondering thought, too swift for horror, with a vast stabbing pain in his chest and a mingling chaos of splintering, cracking roar. Just for a split second as all his senses roared away into Eternity.

"It was terrible," old Jons was saying to the gathered group of newscasters, photographers and sound men who crowded the wrecked little laboratory. "I tried to warn him—it was all so quick. I was so terrified myself—"

They were all gazing at the splintered laboratory floor. Blood crimsoned the wreckage, but the broken body of the murderous Bartoh, with a hole through its chest, had been removed now.

The visitors were peering down through the little jagged rift of splintered board flooring into the littered room below.

"Great Heaven!" someone said. "There's another hole in the floor down there! Are you going to be able to find the damned little thing, Mr. Jons?"

"It oxidizes in the air, burns itself up within half an hour," the old man said. "I was going to keep it in a vacuum. I hadn't yet arranged any of the mechanism for handling it. That was a problem."

"But what was the thing?" one of the newscasters demanded. "I don't yet understand—"

"A new form of matter," Jons said. "A concentration of the atoms—an amazing concentration of atoms—with almost no space between them, packing themselves into the molecules."

The old chemist stood gazing at the awed group of men.

"That little pea weighed two tons," he said.